

CBC Newsletter



for members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., ornithological society of the Carolinas

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Cruise Ship Birding

by *Steve Schultz*

Birding the American tropics is a treat many birders relish. Thoughts of parrots, parakeets, colourful jungle species and favorite summer residents in tropical surroundings often come to mind. In many cases expensive airfare to obscure locations, debatable quality of food and water, and rustic accommodations must also be considered. One way to get a taste of tropical birding, enjoy luxurious accommodations, and do so relatively inexpensively, is by booking a cruise to the Caribbean.

Cruises to the Caribbean and east coast of Mexico are generally offered in three, five, seven and ten night packages. The popular seven night cruises offer the opportunity to visit three to four islands or countries and often allow access to a variety of habitats. Although visitors have a fairly limited amount of time in each port of call, these trips can offer a good introduction to the avifauna of each location, an opportunity to visit with a new set of species each stop, and frequently some nice additions to ones life list.

I enjoyed just such a trip in late September 2001 while cruising on Royal Caribbean's "*Enchantment of the Seas*". Our itinerary included stops in Key West, Florida; Cozumel, Mexico; Costa

Maya (Majahual), Mexico; and Georgetown, Grand Cayman. Each stop provided opportunities for birding either on group tours or individually. While I will describe these particular ports, nearly any itinerary in the Caribbean offers similar opportunities.

KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Key West is a unique port of call for the birder in that birds located are countable for ABA lists. The first "specialty" most birders locate in Key West is the Magnificent Frigatebird. The bird is hard to miss soaring across the skies on impossibly long stiletto-shaped wings. Any amount of time in Key West should produce this species, although if missed it is also common throughout the western Caribbean. Another species of interest is the White-crowned Pigeon. This tropical pigeon is fairly easy to locate by

scanning the tops of large trees. The Key West lighthouse and the bar on the roof of the La Concha hotel are favorite spots to watch for this and other species including the Grey Kingbird. During the spring, summer, and fall, the Grey Kingbird is a fairly common breeder in the keys. Look for birds on the utility wires throughout town. Also possible in Key West are Black-whiskered Vireo and Mangrove Cuckoo, although birders need a certain amount of luck to locate these elusive species. Fall and spring add the excitement of migrants. The Key West Indigenous Species Park on the south side of town is a favorite for migrant passerines. Our stop combined a snorkelling trip to an offshore reef and enough time to wander through town and pick up several species for our year lists.

Continued on page 2

Carolina Bird Club Winter

Washington, NC.

17-19 of January, 2003

***For more information contact Sandy Cash
scash@mindspring.com or***

Continued from page 1

COZUMEL, MEXICO

Cozumel provides the first opportunity for "south of the border" birding on this itinerary. The trip between Key West and Cozumel is made overnight so your ship should be docked early in the morning allowing for a full day of activities, but preventing you from doing any pelagic birding in the Straits of Florida. Cozumel lies only 12 miles off the Yucatan coast of Mexico, but is home to several endemic species and sub-species including the Cozumel Vireo and the Cozumel Wren (a subspecies of the Northern House Wren). One of my favorite birding spots on Cozumel is Chankanaab National Park on the island's sheltered western coast. The park is a short \$10 [US] cab ride from the docking piers. Fairly common and easy to locate resident birds include Cozumel and Yucatan Vireo, Bananaquit, Western Spindalis, and Fork-tailed Emerald. Our visit this fall produced these species as well as quite a few of "our" summer warblers either on their wintering grounds or migrating south. The park is full of maintained trails that allow access to nearly every portion of the compound. Note that this "national park" is quite small by US standards and is more similar in size to a small state park. Chankanaab also offers superb snorkelling, close up looks at the resident iguanas, a restaurant, and a chance to interact with dolphins.

COSTA MAYA, MEXICO

Costa Maya is a Mexican government project to build a new cruise port on the southern Yucatan coast. The closest town is the coastal fishing village of

Majahual. Current amenities for non-birders include two popular beaches, restaurants, shops, a large saltwater pool and twice daily dance performances. Birders may wish to join a tour to one of the Mayan ruins just inland. Trips to these ruins combine a unique cultural experience as well as an opportunity to view species that may be completely unfamiliar to birders used to ABA species. Our recent visit provided views of Red-throated Ant Tanager, Citrolene Trogon, Aztec Parakeet and Yellow-winged



Tanager in the jungle surrounding the Chacchoben Ruins just north of the Belize border. More familiar species such as Groove-billed Ani and wintering wood warblers are common as well. This is the only place I have seen numbers of Prothonotary Warblers walking about on the ground foraging! Birders not wishing to join a tour can contract with local drivers to visit locations in the area. It should be mentioned that persons wishing to strike out on their own should have a working knowledge of Spanish, as English speakers are not as common here as in areas with a higher tourist volume.

GRAND CAYMAN

The birding here certainly is grand. Endemic species and sub-species, easy access to birding sights, and the hospitality of a British territory combine to make Grand Cayman a rewarding birding experience. Probably the best

place to observe passerines is the Queen Elizabeth Botanic Park located nearly in the center of the island. Two of the main attractions here are the Vitelline Warbler and the Grand Cayman subspecies of the Cuban Parrot. Both are fairly common in the park and are joined by La Sagra's Flycatcher, Cuban Bullfinch, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Mangrove Cuckoo, Zenaida and Caribbean Doves, Yucatan and Thick-billed Vireos, and migrant passerines. Access to the Botanic Park is best by rental car as cab fare is normally prohibitively expensive and bus travel is frequently not well timed for cruise visitors. Admission to the park is CI\$6 or about \$7.50US.

Closer to the tender piers birders may expect to find Smooth-billed Ani and Greater Antillean Grackle along with the common White-winged Dove, Grey Kingbird, and Loggerhead Kingbird. These species can be enjoyed in downtown Georgetown, the arrival point for cruise passengers and location of restaurants, shops, and hotels.

A note on "pelagic birding"- While most cruises have one or more "sea days", my experience has been that very few birds will be seen from the ship in the open ocean. The waters of the Caribbean are relatively nutrient poor as compared to waters in more northerly climes. As a result the density of the traditionally pelagic species is quite low. Cruises during peak migration times may provide sighting of birds that look decidedly out of place at sea. Last year we had an American Redstart in the dining room one breakfast, and had a Wood Thrush circle the boat several times before winging toward

the coast of Cuba. This year's trip provided only four "pelagics", a White-winged Dove 150 miles off the coast of Honduras and three small, unidentified passerines.

Part of the magic of cruise ship birding is knowing your next port

of call will have a whole new set of birds to locate and observe. Some itineraries include stops in the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the islands of the eastern Caribbean. Each island holds the possibility of different species and habitats from the island or port you

stopped in the day before. Add the excellent food, activities, nightlife and floor shows provided on most cruise liners and you have the perfect recipe for a tropical birding adventure during the day and fun and relaxing activities all night long.

Museum Announces "SAVE A BIRD" Campaign

Museum's Audubon Exhibition Calls Attention to the Frail Condition of This Rare Work

The North Carolina Museum of Art announces its "Save a Bird" campaign, formalizing plans for the complete conservation of its bound set of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*. The campaign gives the public an opportunity to adopt the bird of their choice, and sponsors will receive a commemorative document of their support and credit in wall labels when these books are placed on view.

"Save a Bird" participants can contribute \$750 to cover the restoration of the bird of their choice, including the many popular plates that were restored for the current exhibition, such as the Wild Turkey, Carolina Parrot or Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. Additional birds from the first of the four folios in the bound set are also currently available for sponsorship, and the conservation work will be done in batches as sufficient funds are raised. Birds from the three other folios will be made available for sponsorship after work on the first volume is underway. And sponsors will enjoy a reception at the Museum when the restored volume featuring their bird is placed on display.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for bird lovers, book lovers and art lovers to have a role in restoring a true treasure of the Museum's collection," said Georganne Bingham, the Museum's deputy director for development and membership. "People can sponsor birds in tribute to family members or friends, or as memorials or just for themselves. And their support will be recognized whenever these works are enjoyed in the future, whether here at the Museum or in exhibitions around the state."

Twenty-three plates and two bound folios from the Museum's copy of *The Birds of America* (1827-1838) are on exhibition at the Museum through Dec. 1, 2002. Fewer than 200 bound sets of these landmark books - termed double-elephant folios because of their monumental size - are known to exist today. The State of North Carolina purchased its copy of the books in 1846, and they were transferred to the Museum's collection in 1974. As a result of more than a century of handling and the oxidation associated with aging paper, the plates have suffered damage, including soiled, creased and torn paper; and the half-leather and paper bindings of the books themselves have deteriorated beyond repair.

Years ago, the Museum began conservation efforts on the prints by unbinding several of them from the folios, surface-cleaning them and framing them. For this year's exhibition of these works, more substantial repair work was completed on this selection of prints.

"Restoring the Audubons has long been the top priority for the Conservation Department," said Bill Brown, the Museum's chief conservator. "While recent treatment on the plates currently on view has ensured a beautiful presentation for our visitors, there is much cleaning and repairing yet to be done on the more than 400 remaining plates, and these works also need to be rebound. This initiative by the Museum's Development Department is a great step toward turning our dreams into a reality and will build a lasting legacy for all the donors who step up to 'Save a Bird.'"

A full restoration of *The Birds of America* would cost more than \$250,000 and require at least a full year of work. The project will be handled in batches by an outside conservator specializing in works on paper and capable of handling a project of this scope.

For more information on the "Save a Bird" campaign, including a list of birds currently available for sponsorship, please contact the Museum's Development Department at (919) 839-6262, ext. 2125 or go to the Museum's Save a Bird web page.

Mysterious Plague Exacts Increasing Toll On Birds Of Prey

This was sent to me by the folks at the Carolina Raptor Center. I thought you all might be interested in it.

A pair of great horned owls peer with wide eyes around the edge of their shelter, like children sneaking a peek at a TV after their bedtime. But maybe they're simply looking at what just hit them. Unknown numbers of raptors - or birds of prey - are falling to an unprecedented plague this summer. "I have this sense of a tsunami coming through the midsection of this country," said Dr. Patrick Redig, director of the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota. "I don't think it's a stretch to assume the number of birds killed by this is in the thousands."

This curious owl pair is among 21 Great Horned Owls still alive at Nature's Nursery in Lucas County. They are the lucky ones. Eighteen other raptors delivered to the wildlife rehabilitation center since Aug. 12 died.

Across the country, in a line that stretches from Maryland to Iowa, wildlife centers are crushed by the demands of the formerly mighty raptors. The predators come in with heads bobbling, their balance shot, and sometimes seizing. Few rehabilitation centers have been as lucky as Nature's Nursery. Most birds die.

"We received 67 birds. Seven are still alive," said Mona Rutger, director of Back to the Wild in Castalia. "The ones that are recovering are permanently impaired."

The outbreak has many speculating that we're seeing a new face of West Nile virus. But if that's the case, what's changed? The virus has been in the United States since 1999. Until this year, raptors were no more than occasional casualties.

So far, there are only theories, some with disquieting features that suggest potential changes in the virus' transmission pathways. One theory suggests a new insect carrier.

Article published September 16, 2002
By Jenni Laidman, Blade Science Writer



Another possibility is that raptors catch the virus from their prey. While great horned owls seem to be the most at risk, red tail hawks, Cooper's hawks, kestrels, merlins, and even bald eagles have fallen.

"The big question is, what has been the impact on the wild bird population," said Dr. Kathy Converse at the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis. But that's just one of many questions no one can answer yet.

Dr. Converse is trying to address a more urgent problem at the moment: Why are these big birds dying? Her laboratory is overwhelmed with requests for help. It receives 100 bird carcasses a day for analysis. Only a complete examination of the dead animal's organs, tissues, and fluids will reveal what's killing these birds. She frames her results thus far carefully: "A few of the raptors have tested positive for West Nile virus," she said. But a positive test does not confirm that West Nile killed these raptors. Testing positive for antibodies to West Nile only indicates the bite of an infected mosquito. Many bird species, such as the ubiquitous house sparrow, catch West Nile and never miss a wing beat. Most humans also show no symptoms.

But even when a bird sickens from West Nile, the virus alone may not be lethal. Another unrelated germ or toxin may team up with West Nile to weaken the host. For instance, the Toledo Zoo veterinary staff thinks a combination of avian malaria and West Nile may be attacking the zoo's penguins.

Kay McKeever in Vineland, Ont., thinks she knows how West Nile arrived to kill 74 of the 234 owls she breeds for release to the wild. And she's not blaming mosquitoes. She faults a bird parasite called the Hippoboscoid fly. It's actually a group of flies also known as louse flies or flat flies. These insects feed on blood in the quill of emerging feathers of large birds. "We had

millions of flat flies. We've never, ever before seen anything like this," she said. She blames a mild winter that allowed most of the fly pupae to live.

"I think the Hippoboscids may have played a role, although we're in the middle of trying to investigate that" said Dr. Bruce Hunter, the wildlife pathologist at the University of Guelph who's worked with Ms. McKeever's Owl Foundation for about eight years. Dr. Hunter said it might be possible for the flies to carry West Nile on contaminated mouthparts. He thinks it's less likely that the virus can live inside the flies the way it lives in mosquitoes. But he doubts these flies bring the virus to wild owls. "In this facility, there's a heavy concentration of captive owls used in a propagation program," he said. Wild owls are dispersed, and therefore less vulnerable.

Yet a number of wildlife rehabilitation facilities have noted an increase in Hippoboscids on the owls and hawks they've rescued. "There have been an inordinate amount of Hippoboscids on flies. We have never seen such an infestation [on raptors]," said Maggie Wright, manager of the Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center in Kirtland, east of Cleveland. "I noticed early on, all spring and summer, an unusual infestation of them on incoming birds," said Ms. Rutger, of Back to the Wild. "Even in advance of the appearance of West Nile, we noted a heavy infestation of Hippoboscids on flies," said Dr. Redig in Minnesota. But no one knows whether these observations have any meaning. "I know that it is a suggestion from some of the wildlife biologists", said Dr. Emi Saiko, West Nile disease surveillance coordinator at the National Wildlife Health Center. "We can't discount it, but we don't really know. I don't think anyone's had the time to look at it yet."

At Nature's Nursery in Lucas County, Laura Ponceby-Zitzelberger said she has noticed no increase in Hippoboscids on flies. While bird deaths have been a hallmark of West Nile since it arrived in the United States in 1999, it's not clear West Nile has always killed birds. One

other West Nile outbreak is identified with significant bird mortality, and that was in Israel in 1998. Research has since revealed the U.S. strain of West Nile is genetically identical to the strain that caused the outbreak in Israel. Most of the bird victims in the United States are in a family that includes crows and blue jays. It appears any crow infected with West Nile dies from it. And this brings up another theory of why raptors are dying now. Great-horned owls in particular eat crows. "Sick and moribund crows would be easy pickings," Dr. Redig said.

One study suggests such disease transmission is possible. Dr. Robert Mc Lane with the National Wildlife Research Center in Fort Collins, Colo., put infected crows in a cage with uninfected crows. All the crows died. "They excrete a lot of virus," Dr. Mc Lane said. A previous study showed that infected crows caged separately would not pass the virus, suggesting that at close quarters, the virus passes orally, not through the air.

But even when West Nile fails to hurt birds, they are always part of the picture in the advance of the virus. Bird-feeding mosquitoes spread the disease among birds, and birds carry the virus when they migrate. While it's not certain how West Nile first crossed the Atlantic to invade the United States, the viral spread since 1999 has followed a zigzag pattern that tracks bird migratory paths, said Dr. McLane. He and others predict birds will carry the virus south into Central and South America, if they haven't already.

While it could be months and years before the larger scientific questions about West Nile are answered, centers such as Nature's Nursery and Back to the Wild hope for some relief soon. Increased bird illness threatens to hobble them.

"Last year we had 1,713 rescues. As of today, we're at 1,733, and last year was our biggest year ever," said Ms. Ponceby-Zitzelberger. It's putting a real drain on us."

Note from Editor: You might want to check with your local rehabilitators to find out how you can help them!

Birding Events and Festivals, Autumn 2002

OCTOBER:

- 10-4-02 - Eastern Shore of Virginia Birding Festival, Kiptopeke, VA, 757-787-2460, <http://www.esvachamber.org>
- 10-5-02 - Blackwater NWR Open House, Cambridge, MD, 410-228-2677, <http://blackwater.fws.gov/>
- 10-10/13-02 - Annual Florida Panhandle Birding Festival, Port St. Joe, FL, 850-229-9464, <http://www.birdfestival.org>
- 10-11/13-02 - Florida Keys Birding Festival, Big Pine Key, FL, 305-743-2437
- 10-15/20-02 - Wings Over Water, Outer Banks, Manteo, NC, 252-473-1131 x19, <http://www.northeast-nc.com/wings>
- 10-25/27-02 - Cape May Autumn Weekend, The Bird Show, Cape May, NJ, 609-861-0700, CMBO, NJ Audubon, www.njaudubon.org
- 10-26-02 - Waterfowl Festival, Smyrna, DE, 302-653-9345, Bombay Hook NWR, 302-653-6872, <http://bombayhook.fws.gov/>
- 10-13-02 - Adirondack Raptor Celebration, Newcomb, NY, 518-327-3000, <http://www.northnet.org/adirondackvic/skednewcomb.html>

NOVEMBER:

- 11-6/10-02 - Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, Harlingen, TX, 800-531-7346, www.rgvbirdfest.com/
- 11-8/10-02 - Waterfowl Festival, Easton, MD, 410-822-4567, <http://www.waterfowlfestival.org/>
- 11-13/17-02 - Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival, Titusville, FL, 321-268-5224, <http://www.nbbd.com/fly/>

- 11-15/30-02 - Mattamuskeet NWR Open House Tours, 252-926-4021, www.albemarle-nc.com/hyde/events/swandays.htm
- 11-19/24-02 - Festival of Cranes, Socorro, NM, 505-835-0424, <http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/crane>
- 11-23 thru 11-30-02 - Waterfowl Week, Chincoteague, VA, 757-336-6122, [http://chinco.fws.gov/calendar.htm#Special Events](http://chinco.fws.gov/calendar.htm#Special%20Events)
- 11-22/24-02 - South Texas Birding Festival, Kingsville, TX, 361-592-8516, <http://www.kingsvilletexas.com/Birds.asp>

DECEMBER:

- 12-7/8-02 - Swan Days Festival, Swan Quarter, NC, 252-926-9311, <http://www.albemarle-nc.com/hyde/events/swandays.htm>

..... Swan Days Birdathon

All birders, novice to expert, are invited to form teams and compete in the first Swan Days Birdathon to be held Saturday, December 7, 2002, in the Lake Mattamuskeet vicinity, Hyde County, NC. For details and the registration form, go to <http://www.albemarle-nc.com/hyde/events> and click on Swan Days, then follow through for a Swan Days program and Birdathon information.

All registered teams will be treated to an oyster roast at Mattamuskeet NWR on Saturday evening and are welcome to participate in the Saturday Evening Program ("Mattamuskeet Nights - Sounds and Sights", a slide show and discussion of native owls and rails followed by an owling excursion - all led by Allen Bryan).

CAROLINA BIRD CLUB WINTER MEETING REGISTRATION FORM

January 17-19, 2003

Name: _____ Day Phone: _____
Address: _____ Evening Phone: _____
City: _____ ST: _____ ZIP: _____ Email: _____
Enclosed is a check for \$_____ for _____ member (\$10) registration(s) and/or _____ nonmember (\$20) registration(s).
Please include names not listed above: _____

____ This my [our] first time attending a CBC meeting.

Make checks payable to Carolina Bird Club & send to: CBC, 11 West Jones Street, Raleigh NC 27601-1029

Membership News

This information was originally in the June/July newsletter which was incorrectly printed.

It is with a sad heart that we report the following:

LARRY CRAWFORD

On April 16, 2002 several of us got to say goodbye to Carolina Bird Club charter member Larry Crawford at a memorial service conducted by fellow Carolina Bird Club member Rev. Dr. Richard (Rich) Boyd, Presbyterian minister, here in New Bern. Rich did a splendid job leading the service for one of NC birding's class acts. Larry would have been 73 yesterday.

A gentleman with a tremendous competitive spirit, Larry had the toughness of a John Wayne. Most people that didn't know Larry extremely well didn't realize what a terrible heart condition he lived with. He had undergone over 19 heart procedures in the last 20 years. He survived these last 10+ years on sheer grit and determination. Larry never bemoan his condition or complain about his chest pains but as Bob Holmes put it, "He could pop nitroglycerins like Chicklets."

Larry finished the race with 397 NC birds -- his goal of 400 just out of reach. Many of us were pulling hard for Larry and hoping he'd live long enough to see #400. Most days in the last six months he didn't even get out of bed. He will be sorely missed.

-Bob Holmes

PEGGY LASHER

On May 15, 2002 Peggy Lasher, an active CBC member as well as a member of the Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society board was killed in a car accident. She was past president of EMAS and was instrumental in saving the Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary which EMAS now owns.

-Charlotte Goedsche

HIAKU BY RUSS PALMERI



Spring 01

*Fog and rain, the sky
touching the new green treetops,
a lone warbler sings*

June 01

*A summer storm
thunder, the patter of rain
silences the birds*

June 01

*Indigo bunting
bumping bumping my window
gives me a headache*

Spring 02

*Round and round
here and gone
Brown Creeper*

CBC Board Members

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Submit membership applications and change of address to:

*CBC Headquarters Secretary
11 W. Jones St.,
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CBC

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Welcome New Members

Susan Hubley
Kingsport, TN

Lucy Quintilliano
Charlotte, NC

Deceased

Charles M. Frost
Winston-Salem, NC

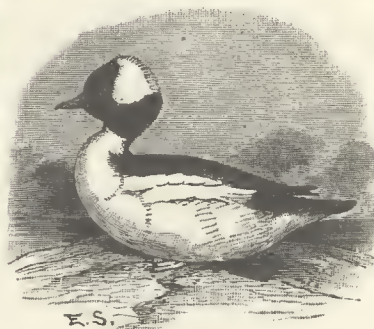
Susan Madson
North Myrtle Beach, SC

Mark Spinks
Georgetown, SC

Janie Owens
Swannanoa, NC

UP COMING CBC WEEKENDS

Spring, 2003 - Clemson, SC
Sep 19-21, 2003 - Hickory, NC
Winter, 2004 - Beaufort, SC
Spring, 2004 - Fontana, NC



WHAT'S INSIDE

Cruise Ship Birding	1
Mysterious Plague	4
Birding Festivals	6
Swan Days Birdathon	6
Membership News	7
Haiku	7

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WEB SITE: www.carolinabirdclub.org